Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

On the POETICAL CHARACTER *of* DOCTOR GOLDSMITH. *By the Rev.* ARCHDEACON BURROWES, *late Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and M. R. I. A.*

Read April 22d 1797.

DOCTOR Johnſon's lives of the Engliſh Poets, however his deciſions may in ſome inſtances be controverted, contain a body of the moſt ſound and valuable criticiſm. Regular treatiſes of elementary principles on the ſubject at large are more difficult and leſs entertaining than a collection of judicious obſervations on particular works or particular authors. The latter lie within a narrower compaſs, and require little antecedent preparation in the reader, while the former appear in an abſtract form, and being uſually concluſions by induction pre-ſuppoſe a knowledge of the particulars from which they are inferred, or being deductions from metaphyſical principles in human nature are abſtruſe and technical. General truths are perhaps beſt taught by their ſpecific application, where growing naturally from the inſtance they partake of its familiarity and are developed by its explication.

THE plan laid down by the publiſhers of the collection of Engliſh Poetry to which Johnſon's lives are prefixed has left ſome authors of acknowledged merit unnoticed by the critic. But the life of Savage, which exhibits inceſſant efforts in the biographer to palliate groſs violations of morals and decorum, and the remarks on Gray, in which their author ſeems to be wholly inſenſible to poetical merit of the higheſt claſs, leave us little reaſon to regret that Johnſon was not employed to write the lives or criticiſe the works of all his poetical contemporaries. Among the authors thus left to the animadverſion of humbler critics our countryman GOLDSMITH ſtands conſpicuous. His poetical works altogether do not amount to eighteen hundred lines, and yet ſuch is the tranſcendent merit of his two principal poems, that as a poet Goldſmith is more generally known and celebrated than many of thoſe who have compoſed whole volumes. Criticiſm cannot be more agreeably or more uſefully employed than in tracing out the ſources of his excellence and analyzing its modes, in exhibiting the negligences for which they often compenſate and the culpable exceſs to which they ſometimes run, and in contemplating by detail the literary character of an author of whom it is pronounced from high authority * that " *he poſſeſſed the art of being minute* " *without tediouſneſs, and general without confuſion, and that his* " *language*

* Johnſon in his Life of Parnell.

" *language was copious without exuberance, exact without conſtraint,*
" *and eaſy without weakneſs.*"

GOLDSMITH ſeems to have poſſeſſed every quality which might give popularity to a poet. His language is ſimple, his verſification flowing and familiar, his ſentiments natural and pathetic. His illuſtrations are not pompous exhibitions of learning, alluſions to arts which are little underſtood, and hiſtories which have been little read; his pictures of nature are not elaborate and minute delineations of individual ſcenery; his views of life are not metaphyſical inveſtigations crippled into rhyme, not conjectural fancies of the manners of remote times or imaginary conditions, not diſguſting expoſures of human infirmity or outrageous caricatures of extravagant ſingularities. Always eaſy and unaffected, Goldſmith paints nature as it ſtruck him and manners as he actually obſerved them. His faults too (for ſome faults his greateſt admirers muſt admit in him—faults allied to his excellencies) are certainly not of an unpopular claſs. If his language is frequently colloquial, and occaſionally even ungrammatical, it is never obſcure: if he laments a depopulation in a country where it did not exiſt, he knew that a people who loved to hear of grievances were to be his readers.

JOHNSON pronounced of the Traveller that it was a production to which ſince the death of Pope it would not be eaſy

 to

to find any thing equal. The laſt poetical work of Pope was publiſhed in 1744, and the Traveller appeared in 1765. Within that period Akenſide, Lyttleton, Dyer, Collins, Shenſtone, Maſon and Churchill flouriſhed, and within that period the Odes of Gray and the Seaſons of Thomſon were publiſhed. Whether Johnſon's encomium be not hyperbolical this catalogue may perhaps ſhew, but certainly it ſufficiently expoſes the unreaſonable querulouſneſs which Goldſmith ſhews when ſpeaking of the literature of his age, of the doubts which he expreſſes in the preface to the Traveller as to the reception his poem might meet with, and of the picture which at the concluſion of the Deſerted Village he has drawn of the neglect and conſequent departure of poetry from his country. This is the tranſmitted peeviſhneſs of poets; a conceited language which Goldſmith took up from Pope, and which found ſupport in the *frigid indifference* with which his friend diſmiſſed his dictionary. Johnſon's good ſenſe ſaw the weakneſs in another, and in his life of Pope reprobates and expoſes it, and Goldſmith lived long enough probably to regret it. At leaſt in his later editions of the Traveller he has expunged that paſſage in the preface which affected to ſay that " the ſtrongeſt " and happieſt efforts of poetry could in his age expect to " pleaſe but in a narrow circle." Goldſmith's might not have been the age of the higheſt claſs of writers, but it certainly exceeded all which went before it in the number of judicious and well inſtructed readers.

Of the poets who were his contempories Goldſmith does not ſpeak in favourable terms. The ſhort and common place criticiſms which were purchaſed from him at the extravagant price of two hundred pounds for two volumes of his Beauties of Engliſh Poetry repreſent Thomſon as verboſe and affected, and Shenſtone's ballads as poſſeſſing neither harmony nor ſimplicity. His Hermit is introduced in the Vicar of Wakefield as a contraſt to the Engliſh poetry of the preſent day, which, he ſays, " is nothing but a combination of luxuriant images " without plot or connection—a ſtring of epithets that im- " prove the ſound without carrying on the ſenſe:" and the preface to the Traveller complains of " criticiſms of late in " favour of blank verſe and Pindaric odes, choruſſes, anapeſts " and iambics, alliterative care and happy negligence," and talks of the poet of the day as " a half-witted thing who wants " to be thought a bold man having loſt the character of a " wiſe one—of his tawdry lampoons being called ſatires, his " turbulence ſaid to be force and his frenzy fire." Theſe attacks on Shenſtone, Maſon and Churchill were not all called for by the occaſion: Goldſmith's ſubjects and his manner precluded any compariſon with the two latter, and if any part of his writings might bear reſemblance to any of thoſe of Shenſtone or Maſon he ſhould have conſidered that there was room on the higher grounds of Parnaſſus for more than one poet of the ſame claſs. But the man who could be diſpleaſed at hearing the praiſes of his friend muſt have deemed

deemed all who poſſeſſed excellence in whatever department as his rivals.

To the ſchemes of his two moſt diſtinguiſhed poems objections have been often made. The ſcheme of the Traveller was, as he tells us, an endeavour to ſhew "that there may be "equal happineſs in ſtates that are differently governed from "our own; that every ſtate has a particular principle of happineſs, and that that this principle in each" (in his firſt edition he adds, and particularly in our own) "may be carried to "a miſchievous exceſs." This poſition of a particular principle of happineſs to each ſtate, which he aſſumes as a known truth, muſt appear at leaſt a diſputable poſition: that all ſpecies of happineſs are equal cannot be granted, and it is certainly a groſs degradation of human nature to ſay, that after nobler aims are repreſſed

Low delights ſucceeding faſt behind
In *happier* meanneſs occupy the mind.

THE concluſion which was written by Doctor Johnſon gives us all which Goldſmith's poem rationally eſtabliſhes, that human bliſs centers only in the mind—that ſtate offences and their puniſhments

To men remote from power but little known
Leave reaſon, faith and conſcience all their own;

and

and that therefore under every government happineſs may be attained, inaſmuch as

> Still to ourſelves in every place conſign'd,
> Our own felicity we make or find.

All this is truth and good ſenſe from the author of the Rambler, but ſurely it is very different from Goldſmith's original poſition.

THE ſcheme of the Deſerted Village was "to regret the depopulation of England, and to inveigh againſt the increaſe of "thoſe luxuries by which it was occaſioned." Goldſmith had found the leading principles of his Traveller controverted, and in his dedication to the Deſerted Village ſeems aware that the ſcheme of this poem alſo was queſtionable. He is aware that it will be objected that "the depopulation it deplores is no where to be ſeen, the diſorders it laments only "to be found in the poets own imagination." To this he ſays he can ſcarce make any other anſwer than "that he ſincerely believes what he had written, and had taken all poſſible pains in his country excurſions for four or five years "paſt to be certain of what he alleged." There is ſome vanity in ſetting up the ſupport collected in a few country excurſions for a favourite theory publiſhed by him ſome years before, againſt the authority of thoſe whom he acknowledges to be the wiſeſt and beſt of his friends. No doubt the luxury

luxury muſt be injurious by which a country is depopulated, but a foreigner who took his ideas of England in the year 1769 from Goldſmith's Deſerted Village would be ſtrangely miſled. Yet on this imaginary and inſecure foundation has been conſtructed a poem which may be expected to laſt as long as the Engliſh language ſhall endure, and nature and ſimplicity delight.

But though Goldſmith's Theories are not eſtabliſhed truths, the author certainly wrote himſelf into a full perſuaſion of them, and it is our ſatisfaction that they afford topics admirably adapted for diſplaying his peculiar felicities and communicating his ſelected information. About two hundred lines of the Traveller were ſent by him from Switzerland to his brother. It is natural to ſuppoſe that theſe contained the author's deſcriptions of the countries through which he had travelled, and obſervations on the manners of their inhabitants. The ſuperior excellency of the portrait of the Swiſs ſeems to warrant this ſuppoſition. Pleaſed with his own rambling life he ſaw the people apparently happy wherever he went. At his return he ſaw the happineſs of his own country and compoſed his poem on the theory of equal happineſs every where, and in the contraſted characters of the ſeveral ſtates which he had viſited he thought he ſaw the particular principle on which it was founded. As a writer more than as a politician he perceived the powerful influence of party in England,

England, for party he tells us is there the moſt dangerous enemy to poetry. He attempts to moderate the rage of all parties by an endeavour to ſhew that patriotic boaſting is the ſhame of reaſon, ſince nature and art afford equal happineſs every where. The poet, miſled by the different ſenſes of the ſame word, never conſidered that poetical party might ſubſiſt though national ſhould be deſtroyed, or that party might in any ſingle country produce the worſt effects though that country and its neighbours were admitted to be equally happy. But the reader may be fully ſatisfied with any means of introduction to thoſe admirable national characters which actual inſpection had made known to Goldſmith, and which his poetic fancy could ſo beautifully delineate.

In his review of the Engliſh character, under the influence of vanity not yet ſufficiently gratified with public notoriety, and of liberality not limited by prudential experience, he deems every man unhappy who is poor, and every man a ſlave who is not born a legiſlator. What he had ſtated in his Traveller in his next poem he would not contradict. He condemns the luxury which was beyond his reach, and with the eye of a poet he ſees its effects in an imaginary depopulation. His enthuſiaſm became confirmed in its belief—he had talents to deſcribe it pathetically, and by a proceſs ſimilar to thoſe algebraic calculations which from falſe ſuppoſitions elicit the truth, he has made it the occaſion of introducing in his Deſerted

Village images which we feel to be impreſſive, and ſentiments which we acknowledge to be juſt.

The conduct of theſe poems, if not ſtrictly regular, is natural and unembarraſſed: the digreſſions are always ſeaſonable, and the returns eaſy. The Deſerted Village begins with a general view of Auburn in its former ſtate of happineſs and population, which is immediately contraſted with its preſent decay —then the author recurs to more diſtinct particulars of its recollected proſperity—to the clergyman, the ſchoolmaſter and the village ale-houſe—he contemplates the decay—he inveſtigates its cauſes—he contraſts the benefit with the evils of luxury —he paints the horrors and marks by a pathetic detail the progreſs of emigration. If any part appears not firmly rivetted to his ſubject, it is the concluſion, that beautiful eulogium on poetry which no reader would ſhew himſelf ſo coldly attached to method as to give up. The Traveller ſeems to have no part ſuperfluous and none ill-placed. To the concluding topic, of which Doctor Johnſon ſays the Deſerted Village is too much the echo, we are naturally led. The omiſſion of the undiſtinguiſhed character of the Netherlands was peculiarly judicious. The only improvement which might be ſuggeſted would be the interpoſing a character of Spain between Holland and England. The connection between theſe as it ſtands in the poem is faſtened on a flimſy feeble minuteneſs thrown unneceſſarily and unreaſonably

unreaſonably into the character of the Dutch. As their diſregard of freedom was certainly not greater than that of France or Italy England is not with better effect contraſted with Holland than it might have been with either of the others. From Holland hiſtory might have led by a natural connection to Spain, and the Spaniſh character would afford an admirable contraſt to the Dutch and the Engliſh, the two between which it would be placed. 'Tis true the poet looks from the Alps, and Spain might lie hid behind the Pyrenees—but I apprehend the miraculous improvement of viſion which from the Alpine heights could diſcern objects ſo minute as the temples of Italy ought not to be reſtrained within common limits, and the ſame poetical perſpective which could have brought the moraſſes of Holland into view could alſo have raiſed the remote parts of Spain above the obſtruction of mountains on its nearer confines. The conduct of Goldſmith's Hermit * is exquiſitely beau-

 tiful.

* One paſſage in his Hermit I cannot paſs over without a particular obſervation. It is where the Hermit enumerates the various poſſible cauſes of the ſtranger's apparent uneaſineſs, and, among the reſt, conjectures at *friendſhip unreturned* or *love unregarded.*

> And what is friendſhip but a name,
> A charm that lulls to ſleep;
> A ſhade that follows wealth or fame,
> But leaves the wretch to weep?
>
> And love is ſtill an emptier ſound,
> The modern fair one's jeſt;
> On earth unſeen, or only found
> To warm the turtle's neſt.

The making the Hermit ſuggeſt that particular mode of treatment in love which he had himſelf experienced, and which the ſtory immediately after recognizes, is peculiarly natural, judicious and affecting.

tiful. The intereſting abruptneſs of its opening—the humane and delicate ſentiments in the Hermit's ſpeech, giving ſo affecting and engaging impreſſion of his character—the ſimplicity of the following narrative—his importunate ſolicitation forcing out at laſt the ſtory of the ſtranger ſo judiciouſly delayed, and the ſurprize and pathos of the concluſion, make this little poem one of the moſt finiſhed pieces of affecting ſimplicity in our language.

NATURAL and affecting ſimplicity forms indeed Goldſmith's peculiar excellence. Yet where his ſubject calls for it Goldſmith is not deficient in ſublimity. His deſcription of the rampires artificial pride may ſerve to prove this,

> Onward methinks and diligently ſlow
> The firm connected bulwark ſeems to grow:
> Spreads its long arms amidſt the wat'ry roar
> Scoops out an empire and uſurps the ſhore.

As may his deſcription of the terrors of that horrid ſhore to which his peaſants emigrate:

> Theſe blazing ſuns that dart a downward ray
> And fiercely ſhed intolerable day;
> Thoſe matted woods where birds forget to ſing,
> But ſilent bats in drowſy cluſters cling;

Thoſe

Thoſe pois'nous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark ſcorpion gathers death around,
Where at each ſtep the ſtranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful ſnake;
Where crouching tygers wait their hapleſs prey,
And ſavage men more murd'rous ſtill than they;
While oft in whirls the mad Tornado flies
Mingling the ravag'd landſcape with the ſkies.

This paſſage is more peculiarly in Goldſmith's manner, the ſublimity here being only an accidental inſtrument to heighten the pathos.

For denſe and ſolid ſentiments—couplets pregnant with ſound reflection in forcible language, fitted to impreſs themſelves on the memory, and to incorporate in the maſs of popular morals, we in vain look in this author's writings. His moral paſſages are too diffuſe for quotation: they are long addreſſes to luxury or to freedom, connected details of the evils of faction, whole ſcenes deſcriptive of city profuſion and rural devaſtation, without any effort to concenter their force in one ſtrong apothegm, or to ſum up the particulars in more compact form, and without calling in the ſupport of any acknowledged and inſtructive truth, delivered in abſtract preciſion and cloathed in impreſſive language. I know but one attempt of Goldſmith's at condenſing the ſubſtance of an antecedent detail, and but one of his couplets containing a moral ſentiment

ſentiment of ſolid compactneſs. The firſt is the concluſion of a paſſage where the ſplendors of luxury are contraſted with its evils: the peaſant, he ſays, is ſcourged from the ſmiling land,

> And while he ſinks, without an arm to ſave,
> The country blooms—a garden and a grave.

The ſecond is not ſo happy—it is a deſcription of man in a ſtate of early ſimplicity and imagined equality,

> His beſt companions, innocence and health,
> And his beſt riches ignorance of wealth.

It is however evident from the neceſſity of antecedent explication that theſe paſſages are not without ſome violence detached from the context, and therefore even theſe are not well adapted for popular quotation.

But Goldſmith is not a didactic—he is a deſcriptive poet. And many of his deſcriptions cannot be praiſed too highly. The circumſtances in his natural ſcenes are ſelected with peculiar propriety, and painted in the moſt glowing colours. His views of Italy and Switzerland in his Traveller cannot be excelled. His deſcription of Auburn in its deſerted ſtate would have redeemed an ordinary poem.

> No more thy glaſſy brook reflects the day,
> But choak'd with ſedges works its weedy way:
> Along thy ſhades, a ſolitary gueſt,
> The hollow ſounding bittern guards its neſt:

Amidſt

Amidſt thy deſert walks the lapwing flies
And tires their echo's with unvaried cries:
Sunk are thy bowr's in ſhapeleſs ruin all
And the long graſs oe'rtops the mould'ring wall.

Here we have a highly poetical delineation of every adjunct of a deſolated country, with appropriate epithets to add to the force of the effect, and the *bowers* and *glaſſy brook* from its former ſtate remembered to heighten the deſcription by their contraſt.

SUCH is the general tenor of Goldſmith's deſcription of natural ſcenes. His deſcriptions are by continued enumeration of admirably ſelected circumſtances—each in itſelf expreſſive but the aggregate of inſuperable force. Sometimes however, where he does not allow himſelf to dwell on particular circumſtances, or to embelliſh them by any thing more than a ſingle epithet, the enumeration is but a tame catalogue of beings or of properties, and the deſcription, accurate indeed, but flat and feeble. Take an example from his picture of Holland:

While the pent ocean riſing o'er the pile
Sees an amphibious world beneath him ſmile;
The *ſlow canal*, the *yellow-bloſſom'd vale*,
The *willow-tufted bank*, the *gliding ſail*,
The *crouded mart*, the *cultivated plain*,
A new creation reſcued from his reign.

Left

Leſt it might be thought the poet's judicious art to give a ſtudied tameneſs to the deſcription of the country of Holland, I muſt ſubjoin another inſtance where it certainly was not his object to depreſs his poetical merits to an humble level with his ſubject:

> How often have I paus'd on ev'ry charm
> The *ſhelter'd cot*, the *cultivated farm*,
> The *never-failing brook*, the *buſy mill*,
> The *decent church* that top'd the neighb'ring hill.

Or this,

> Far different theſe from ev'ry former ſcene,
> The *cooling brook*, the *graſſy veſted green*, &c.

In all theſe the author ſeems ſenſible of the tameneſs of the deſcription, and endeavours, with bad effect, to relieve it by the pompous ſolemnity of his compound adjectives.

But the truth is what Goldſmith has himſelf told us in his dedication of the Deſerted Village to Sir Joſhua Reynolds, "that he was ignorant of that art in which his friend excelled." He has therefore no idea of pictureſque effect. He marks no diſtances in his ſcenes—he ſtudies no arrangement of his objects—he enumerates what a fertile fancy and an exact judgment would ſuggeſt, but the painter who ſhould follow him would have their entire diſpoſition to make out. The writings of Mr. Maſon compared with Doctor Goldſmith's ſhew of what importance the knowledge of the ſiſter art is to a poet.

THE deſcriptions of life and manners, of national characters in his Traveller, of profeſſional in his Deſerted Village, and of individual in his Retaliation, are drawn with maſterly ſkill. Goldſmith wrote from actual obſervation with the moſt judicious ſelection. His accounts are faithful and characteriſtic ſketches of the hiſtory of man. The ſports of Auburn are deſcribed with the accuracy of an actual ſpectator and with the feelings of one who had partaken of ſuch *. The character of the French peaſantry is given *con amore.* Goldſmith in the moſt endearing and affecting taſte of true paſtoral poetry gives us ſimple manners which yet agree with exiſting nature and humble life remote from vulgarity. Whatever might degrade or diſguſt is carefully concealed, whatever could amplify is without apparent reſearch produced. In the deſcription of the village ale-houſe, the importance which it adds to the poor man's heart is dwelt upon, and the oblivion of his care, but the idleneſs, the intoxication

* Mr. Anderſon in his criticiſm on Goldſmith prefixed to his edition of his works among the Britiſh poets, makes the following obſervation : " The village " diverſions are perhaps inſiſted on with too much prolixity and amplification. " But we are recompenſed for this generality and redundance by the claſſical and " beautiful particularity and conciſeneſs of the context—the dancing pair, the " ſwain miſtruſtleſs—the baſhful virgin," &c. This obſervation is very nearly ſaying that we are recompenſed for Goldſmith's *generality* by his *particularity*, and for his *redundance* by his *conciſeneſs*.

the quarrels are kept judiciouſly from our view. His deſcription of the occupations of the Swiſs peaſant is a maſter-piece:

> Chearful at morn he wakes from ſhort repoſe,
> Breaſts the keen air and carols as he goes;
> With patient angle trolls the finny deep,
> Or drives the vent'rous ploughſhare to the ſteep;
> Or ſeeks the den where ſnow-tracks mark the way,
> And drags the ſtruggling ſavage into day.

No one ſpecific circumſtance of hardihood has eſcaped him, and ſcarcely a ſingle word occurs in the paſſage which does not add appropriate energy. The ſounds in the village evening and the furniture of the ale-houſe deſerve the ſame praiſe.

When Goldſmith has not leiſure to give a compleat deſcription, where by a few particulars a general propoſition is to be impreſſed, thoſe which he ſelects are always the beſt fitted for their purpoſe. Thus where the vanity of the French is to be exhibited Goldſmith ſays,

> Here vanity aſſumes its pert grimace
> And trims her robes of frize with copper lace,
> Here beggar pride defrauds her daily cheer
> To boaſt one ſplendid banquet once a year.

Where the pleaſures of the luxurious are to be deſcribed as ſickening into pain the particulars which our author's admirable ſelection ſpecifies are the *long pomp* and the *midnight maſquerade*.

But

But one of the greateſt beauties of Goldſmith's deſcriptions is the embelliſhment of his landſcapes by his figures. Every ſcene with him is alive, and even deſolation is made more affecting by the *ſad hiſtorian of the penſive plain* whom he introduces. This is the great art of intereſting the reader: we may contemplate with pleaſure or with ſurprize inanimate nature, but our feelings are for man. The landſcape in return may by its aſſociations reflect congenial impreſſions, and of ſuch Goldſmith takes advantage in the beginning of his Deſerted Village, where the enumeration of affecting objects of ruin and decay naturally gives a melancholy caſt to the mind. It is idle then to complain, as has been done, that our pity is there excited for what cannot ſuffer—for a brook—or a glade—or a walk—or a wall. We do not feel for the inanimate object: our minds are only pre-diſpoſed by the review of theſe melancholy ſcenes to feel pity for the perſons who are afterwards deſcribed, and our feelings are for the peaſants who have been compelled to emigrate from Auburn. The ſolemn darkneſs of a Gothic cathedral is not religion, but its efficacy to produce an awe on the mind which fits it for the reception of religious impreſſions is indiſputable—and he muſt have none of the verſatility of human fancy or the ſympathies of the human heart who could ſo rivet his attention to the externals of the ſcene of deſolation as not to recur to the condition of thoſe who had formerly been its inhabitants.

THE variety of Goldſmith's powers in deſcription of character is perhaps ſhewn moſt ſtrongly in thoſe two which immediately follow each other in his Deſerted Village—the clergyman and the ſchool-maſter. The paſſage in his epitaph " Sive riſus eſſent movendi ſive lachrymæ, affectuum potens at lenis dominator," here comes out an eſtabliſhed truth. If the line

Careleſs their merits or their faults to ſcan,

does not add much praiſe to the clergyman's character; it was however the undiſtinguiſhing liberality for which Goldſmith was himſelf remarkable, and on which he prided himſelf in ſpite of prudence and of propriety. The profeſſional exertions of the clergyman in the diſcharge of his duty, and particularly at the bed of ſickneſs, are recorded in a ſtile of pathetic ſolemnity not to be exceeded. The ſchool-maſter is a contraſt of ſuch oppoſite merit that we might almoſt wonder at its being produced by the ſame hand. Humour cannot produce a picture more rich in the writings of thoſe who could never be ſerious. The affected gravity with which his multifarious learning is produced, the legendary ſtile in which the whole is judiciouſly delivered, and above all the ludicrous circumſtance of ruſtic wonder at the concluſion,

That one ſmall head could carry all he knew

ſhew Goldſmith's powers in this ſtile of poetical compoſition not

not inferior to thoſe which he exhibits in the more ſerious and pathetic. The character of the ſchool-maſter, and deſcription of the village ale-houſe to which he conducts the poet, are genuine productions of that pen which had given to the public the Citizen of the World and the Vicar of Wakefield.

In pathetic images and deſcriptions his Deſerted Village abounds, and it is peculiarly the merit of Goldſmith that he affects us only where we ought to be affected. He does not by any overſwoln amplification of minuteneſſes, by any trick of inſtant vehemence, or by any delineation of the grievances of hypochondriac ſenſibility ſuddenly excite an emotion, of which when we come to conſider its cauſe we are aſhamed. He improves our morals by making us ſympathize with genuine unequivocal affliction: he ſettles habits of uſeful and permanent impreſſion, for he makes us feel for domeſtic diſtreſs—for the fair who is forſaken, and the family which is forced to brave the horrors of emigration.

> When the poor exiles every pleaſure paſt
> Hung round the bow'rs and fondly looked their laſt,
> And took a long farewell and wiſhed in vain
> For ſeats like theſe beyond the weſtern main,
> And ſhudd'ring ſtill to face the diſtant deep
> Return'd, and wept, and ſtill return'd to weep.

The ſubſequent deſcription of the individuals abounds with the higheſt ſtrokes of Goldſmith's powers in the pathetic.

The

THE great praiſe of all our author's compoſitions ſerious or comic, in proſe or verſe, is that every thing appears eaſy, ſimple and natural—without any affectation, and with little appearance of effort or labour. This ſeems extraordinary as to his poems, when we are told his particular mode of compoſition. "He uſed," ſays one of his biographers, "firſt to ſketch out a part of his "deſign in proſe, after which he ſat down carefully to verſify "what he had written, to correct it and to add ideas better ſuited "perhaps to the ſubject." From his view of his materials antecedent to their final and eſtabliſhed arrangement we might expect a judicious general method, and ſuch we actually find; but we might alſo expect that his mode ſhould leave behind it traces of labour and artifice—the advantages of accuracy and the ſtiffneſs of ſtudy. His works on the contrary exhibit no marks of art—his verſe ſeems to contain his firſt thoughts in his firſt expreſſions. The reaſon of this we may perhaps find in the author's character. His vanity had ſo ſtrong an attachment to what he had once written that his poems in all probability differ but little either in ſubſtance or in order from their proſaic elements. It is true Goldſmith's later editions alter many paſſages in his earlier ones, but the reluctance with which he had parted with his former has uſually made his corrections in the latter incomplete, and has left the corrected paſſages at laſt but a ſort of tiſſue between what they were and what they ought to be.

Of his fondneſs for his own writings we have an unequivocal proof in the frequency with which he borrows from himſelf. Sentiments occur in his plays expreſſed in the very ſame words as in his Vicar of Wakefield. The lengthening chain which he drags in his Traveller, as he removes from his brother, connected the Chineſe philoſopher with his friend in the Citizen of the world. The excellent furniture with which he has decorated his village ale-houſe belonged formerly to Scroggen the hackney author whom Goldſmith had before deſcribed. The couplet in his Deſerted Village

> Along the lawn where ſcattered hamlets roſe
> Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repoſe,

is almoſt a tranſcript of the following in his Traveller

> And over fields where ſcatter'd hamlets roſe
> In barren ſolitary pomp repoſe.

And of that ſublime paſſage already quoted which deſcribes the horrors of the weſtern clime we have the original in the Traveller, where

> the pilgrim ſtrays
> Through tangled foreſts and through devious ways,
> Where beaſts with man divided empire claim,
> And the brown Indian marks with murd'rous aim.
> There while above the giddy tempeſt flies
> And all around diſtreſsful yells ariſe, &c.

Passages

PASSAGES of ſuch ſimilarity in ſentiment and expreſſion certainly ſhew the peculiar fondneſs with which Goldſmith looked on any work which he had once given from his hands, and which ſo chained down his imagination to one mode of conſidering a ſubject that whenever that ſubject recurred the author could not view it but in the very ſame light. Goldſmith however appears ſometimes to have caught the ſame fondneſs for ſentiments which had been expreſſed by other authors, and, as if unconſcious of their original, delivers them in their identical words and forms of ſpeech. Pope has the following couplet:

> To ſavage beaſts and ſavage laws a prey,
> And kings more furious and ſevere than they,

the laſt line of which is of the very ſame ſtructure with one of our author's quoted in page 83. And no perſon can be prevailed on for a moment to imagine that there is not ſomething more than a caſual coincidence between Goldſmith's

> Man wants but little here below
> Nor wants that little long,

And Young's,

> Man wants but little, nor that little long.

Surely the author who could borrow with ſo ſlender artifice could not ſuſpect himſelf of plagiariſm and muſt have miſtaken the treaſures of his reading for the conceptions of his fancy.

THIS

THIS identity of phraſe on the recurrence of the ſame ſubjects certainly indicates a ſcantineſs in Goldſmith's vocabulary. He has alſo favourite words and forms which ſhew themſelves in every page. We have the unfeeling *train*, and the lowly *train*, and the vagrant *train*, and the harmleſs *train*, and the buſy *train*, and the loveliеſt *train*, and the gorgeous *train*, all in the Deſerted Village.—We have within its firſt ſeventeen lines the author loitering over *the green* of Auburn—and deſolation ſaddening *all its green*, and the healthful ſports which formerly brightened *all its green*. We have the friend *crowned*, and the glaſs *crowned*, and the board *crowned*—all very looſe and indefinite ſignifications of the word. We have colloquial phraſes, *ſit me down*, —*once a year—many a time—times are altered*. We have weak words, adverbs and prepoſitions often filling up his verſes.—All theſe are careleſs faults which a little attention might have rectified, and founded perhaps in too great a love of ſimplicity and deſire to be familiar.

GOLDSMITH'S diction both in verſe and proſe is extremely eaſy—in ſome places perhaps to negligence. His Traveller begins with ſeveral adjectives ſtrung together,

Remote, unfriended, melancholy, ſlow,

while the ſubſtantive to which they belong does not appear until the ſeventh line. He is not ſtudious of writing with the exactneſs of a grammarian, and therefore ſometimes uſes

preſent for paſt times, ſometimes paſſive for active participles; ſometimes he even gives us paſſages wholly independent of regular connection in the conſtruction of the ſentence, as in his deſcription of the Dutch in his Traveller,

> At gold's ſuperior charms all freedom flies,
> The needy ſell it and the rich man buys;
> *A land of tyrants and a den of ſlaves,*
> Here wretches ſeek diſhonourable graves.

In this paſſage however, and in all of this ſort, it is but fair with reſpect to our author to ſtate that his meaning is not at all obſcure. Goldſmith's conſtructions rarely lead to obſcurity or ambiguity *. Like Addiſon he is ſimple and familiar, and like Addiſon he is elegant and intelligible.

As the epithets of other poets have met his cenſure his own are fairly ſubject to animadverſion. His *penſive* plain has been condemned as too bold—I think with little reaſon—with leſs certainly than his *bleak* Swiſs which ſeems more extravagant, his

* There is one form of phraſe uſed frequently by Goldſmith, which, if followed, might in other authors lead to ambiguity—it is the deferring of circumſtances which limit a particular ſubſtantive until other ſubſtantives ſhall have been interpoſed. In the couplet,

> Whatever blooms in torrid tracts appear
> Whoſe bright ſucceſſion decks the varied year,

The bright ſucceſſion ſeems rather to belong, by the conſtruction, to *tracts* than to *blooms*.

his *ſenſual* bliſs which may be miſtaken, or his *plethoric* ill which is technical. He is too fond of compounding new words by the mere inartificial addition of two known ones, as *wave-ſubjected*, *ſhelter-ſeeking*, *rocky-creſted*, and crouding them together until the reader is diſguſted with their monotony. But many of his ſimple epithets have a force of argumentative ſignification and beauty of delicate expreſſion which the pomp of learned ſounds cannot often reach—as in the following lines:

> " The toiling pleaſure ſickens into pain."
> " No buſy ſteps the graſs grown footway tread."
> " Here the pale artiſt plies the ſickly trade."
> " The robe that wraps his limbs in ſilken ſloth."

You have in a ſingle epithet the ſtate of Swiſs morals fully accounted for,

> And love's and friendſhip's finely-pointed dart
> Fall blunted from each *indurated* heart.

And in another epithet you have a complete picture of the Italian ſcenery,

> Its uplands ſloping deck the mountains ſide,
> Woods over woods in gay *theatric* pride.

THUS we ſee that though eaſe and ſimpliciy are the characteriſtics of our author's writings, yet there is no want of ornament in his imagery or of metaphorical graces in his diction.

tion. His ſimiles therefore might be expected to be, as indeed they are, beautiful pictures and well adapted illuſtrations. With their acknowledged merits of this ſort they certainly unite one of ſingular ſubtilty. Many of them are local images, the appropriate growth of the ſcene or country which he deſcribes. The mean delights of the modern Italians ſucceeding the nobler aims of their progenitors are illuſtrated by the ſimile of the peaſant ſeeking ſhelter in thoſe domes where Cæſars once bore ſway *. The virtues of the Swiſs are like falcons cowring on the neſt: the Dutch, conformed to ſervitude, are

Dull as their lakes which ſleep beneath the ſtorm.

Such a felicity in his ſimiles embodies them into the main ſubject, and even gives an apparent ſtrength to the theory in his Traveller, by an indirect intimation that the national character is founded in ſome aſſociate circumſtance of the natural hiſtory of each country.

The ſimile in which our author compares the miſer's rapture at the view of his hoards and his ſighs for thoſe which are wanting with the alternate paſſions in his own breaſt, of pleaſure

* The ſame effect is produced by an artifice of Goldſmith's diction. The peculiarity of the word *long-fall'n* as applied to the mind in Italy naturally recals to our view the *long-fall'n* columns in the ſame country which had been mentioned but eleven lines before, and thus induces a mental compariſon between the ſtate of their arts and their minds.

pleaſure at the goods which Heaven has given to man, and ſorrow to ſee the *board* of human bliſs ſo ſmall, pleaſes me more than the more celebrated ones of the child clinging

Cloſe and cloſer to the mother's breaſt,

and the circle bounding earth and ſkies which

Allures from far and as he follows flies *.

The cauſe of the child's clinging has no connection with the mother to whoſe breaſt ſhe clings, whereas the loud torrent and the mountains roar is a natural adjunct to thoſe mountains to which the Swiſs peaſant is more firmly bound: and how the horizon allures from far by no means appears. But the two ſimiles which decorate the village clergyman, of the bird tempting its new-fledged offspring to the ſkies, and the tall cliff around whoſe head ſettles eternal ſunſhine, are for endearing intereſt and appoſite beauty unequalled by any of our author, and excelled by very few in the language.

GOLDSMITH's verſification has been formed with great exactneſs on the model of Mr. Pope. Whoever reads Windſor Foreſt with attention will find the elements of many paſſages in Goldſmith's writings, will diſcover the original in which he ſtudied poetry

* Strange that one of Goldſmith's commentators ſhould ſpeak of this as a ſimile of the *rainbow!*

poetry and from which he caught by congenial feeling the graces of elegant expreſſion and harmonious verſification. Every poem of Pope's contains ſomething, which to a reader who knows our author will recall ſome paſſage in his works by a word or by a conſtruction, by ſome turn of the verſe or of the ſentiment. Goldſmith's verſification is more feeble and more careleſs than Mr. Pope's, but perhaps it is more varied and more ſimple. I cannot avoid quoting one of the ſhorteſt of Goldſmith's poems as a ſpecimen, among many other beauties, of the eaſe of his conſtructions and the harmony of his numbers.

ON MEMORY.

Oh! memory, thou fond deceiver
Still importunate and vain,
To former joys recurring ever,
And turning all the paſt to pain.

Thou, like the world, th' oppreſt oppreſſing,
Thy ſmiles encreaſe the wretch's woe;
And he who wants each other bleſſing
In thee is ſure to find a foe.

In the lines of Goldſmith we have no elaborate equipoiſe between the parts where the latter half is made an epigram upon the former. His only artificial ornament is alliteration which occurs too frequently for us to ſuſpect its being caſual.

He

He continues the ſame thought often beyond the line, and ſometimes beyond the couplet *. Hence it happens that his verſes are natural and their harmony varied, though it muſt be obſerved alſo, that the pauſes in ſound do not always coincide with thoſe in ſenſe. His lines are often eked out by feeble and expletive parts adjoined, ſuch as *more*, *between*, *here*, *ſo*, and ſeveral weak terminations and proſaic verſes might be pointed out in his writings, as where he tells us that the morals of the Swiſs *are but low*—that the train of Auburn at proud men's doors *beg a little bread*—or that nations *though very poor may ſtill be very bleſt*. His rhyming words are generally monoſyllables of the moſt familiar claſs. The word *fire* rhymes in two couplets out of three in his Traveller—the word *round* rhymes three times in eleven couplets in his Deſerted Village. Goldſmith in this reſpect did not ſufficiently conſult variety, but he poſſeſſes thoſe happy arts of engaging the reader's attention to ſome beauty, or intereſting his affections by ſome pathetic image, and the fault which is not perceived is as if it did not exiſt.

GOLDSMITH's faults are all faults of apparent inadvertence; but would his poems be more excellent had he ſtudied to correct

* This is ſometimes attended with a powerful and ſublime effect.

> Beſide the bed where parting life was laid,
> And ſorrow, grief and guilt by turns diſmay'd,
> The reverend champion ſtood. At his controul, &c.

correct them to greater minuteneſs? He might have arranged his thoughts in regular climax—he might have given us contraſted ſentiments and parallel phraſes—he might have deſtined forcible words to important places — he might have condenſed matter for concluding couplets. But his works would have been elaborate—his diction pompous—his verſification meaſured. He would have forfeited his eaſy ſimplicity. Some readers would not ſo well underſtand him and perhaps none ſo much delight in him. At preſent he is a general favourite, and thoſe who think his excellence is of that common nature which any perſon might reach have only to make the attempt and thus convince themſelves of his merit. Paradoxical as it may ſeem, there is no ſtile of writing more difficult of attainment than that which is natural.